Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī and the Salafi Approach to Sufism

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Abstract

This article problematizes the general assumption about the inherent anti-Sufi tendency of the Salafiyya by looking closely at the thought of the Syrian Salafi thinker Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī. The primary text analysed in this article is a brief chapter of Qāsimī's book *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd*, entitled *Buṭlān al-ḥulūl wa-l-ittiḥād* (The Invalidity of Incarnation and Union). Here Qāsimī discusses the notions of *ḥulūl* (incarnation) and *ittiḥād* (union), and defends the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) attributed to the *shaykh akbar* Ibn ʿArabī which led Qāsimī to stand up against the *shaykh al-islām* Ibn Taymiyya who accused Ibn ʿArabī of being a heretic. This article discusses Qāsimī's defense of Ibn ʿArabī within a broader context of the Salafi approach to Sufism. In this context, the case of Qāsimī presents us with an insight that the Salafis took a more nuanced position than is sometimes supposed. We will conclude with a brief reflection on how we could situate Qāsimī's view of Ibn ʿArabī within the ongoing debate about the relationship between the Salafiyya and Sufism in more recent scholarship.

The Salafiyya, one of the most influential modern Islamic reform move-
ments, has generally been viewed as the relentless enemy of Sufism.
Mark Sedgwick argues that "The significance of Salafism for anti-Sufism
was not just that instead of combating rationalism it accepted and even
encouraged it, but it was also actively anti-Sufi."[1] The most recent
scholarly discussion of anti-Sufi movements took place at the interna-
tional conference on "Sufism and its Opponents", held in Utrecht,
Netherlands, in May 1995 and was published under the title "Islamic
Mysticism Contested". Much of the conference's discussion focused on
anti-Sufi movements, including "the Salafiyya for whom mysticism
went against their Puritanism and scripturalism."[2] Seeing Salafiyya and
Sufism as antithetical is also prevalent among Muslim authors.[3] Whereas
most scholars tend to think of Salafiyya and Sufism as diametrically
opposed, this article questions the notion that the Salafiyya movement
was inherently anti-Sufi.

   The main argument put forward here is that the Salafis took a more
nuanced position towards Sufism than is sometimes supposed. We will
explore the diversity of the Salafi approach to Sufism by examining an
often overlooked chapter in a work called *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd* written by
Syrian Salafi thinker Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914). In this chapter,
entitled *Buṭlān al-ḥulūl wa-l-ittiḥād* (The Invalidity of Incarnation and
Union), Qāsimī puts forth a complex view of Sufism, what makes it
difficult to simply label him an anti-Sufi reformist. While attacking
what he considers reprehensible innovations (*bidaʿ*) of Sufi practices,

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[1] Mark Sedgwick, "In Search of a Counter-Reformation: Anti-Sufi Stereotypes and the
Budshishiyya's Response", in Michaelle Browers & Charles Kurzman (eds.), *An Islamic
Reformation?* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 130.

[2] Josef van Ess, "Sufism and Its Opponents: Reflections on Topoi, Tribulations, and
Transformations", in Frederick de Jong & Bernd Radtke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested:
Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 39. In addition to the
Salafiyya, van Ess discusses two other anti-Sufi forces, namely, "the political reformers for
whom it [Sufism] went against their secularism and nationalism, and the Europeans for
whom it went against their imperialism and colonialism."

[3] See, for example, Muṣṭafā Ḥilmī, *al-Taṣawwuf wa-l-ittijāh al-salafī fī l-ʿaṣr al-ḥadīth*
(Alexandria: Dār al-Daʿwa, 1982); ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad al-ʿAbd, *al-Taṣawwuf fī l-islām
wa-ahamm al-iʿtirāḍāt ʿalayhi* (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1986); ʿAbd al-Ḥāfiẓ b. al-Mālik
ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq al-Makkī, *Mawqif aʾimmat al-ḥaraka al-salafiyya min al-ṣūfiyya wa-l-taṣawwuf*
(Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 1988).

Qāsimī praises and even defends the more sober teachings and practices of some of the early Sufis. The questions which thus arise are as follows: What kind of Sufism did Qāsimī accommodate? Who were the Sufis that he rejected and/or accepted? And finally, what accounts for his defense of Ibn ʿArabī's (d. 1240) idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*?

Despite his criticism of popular Sufi practices, Qāsimī, like a number of other Salafi reformers, remained committed to Sufi revivalist ideas. This is particularly evident in his defense of Ibn ʿArabī's concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which put him in opposition to the famed Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), a central figure for the Salafiyya movement. Nonetheless, Qāsimī was strongly committed to reviving the general trends of Ibn Taymiyya's thought, albeit trying to fuse them with a more positive view of Sufism.

Biographical Sketch

Qāsimī was born in Damascus to a family of *ʿulamāʾ* in 1866 and, in due time, became the most proponent religious reformer in late Ottoman Syria.[4] Itzchak Weismann rightly calls Qāsimī "the mouthpiece of the early Damascene Salafiyya".[5] Qāsimī studied with the prestigious *ʿulamāʾ* and Sufis of his time. Enjoying a traditional *ʿulamāʾ* education, he began by memorizing the Qurʾān, studied *tafsīr* and finally was appointed as the Shāfiʿī prayer leader at the ʿAnnaba mosque at the age of 20. It is not clear when he entered the circle of the Salafiyya and who inspired him. During his earlier life, he was "following the path of Naqshbandī order".[6] David Commins sees the year 1888 as marking his entrance into Salafi circles, as it was in this year that he composed a recitation in honor of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid al-nabī*).[7] Although this text excluded customary anecdotes of a

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[4] Nizār Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: Aḥad ʿulamāʾ al-iṣlāḥ al-ḥadīth fī l-Shām* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1997), 67.

[5] Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 143.

[6] Ibid., 304.

[7] David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 46.

miraculous and superstitious kind which points to its Salafi nature, he identifies himself at the end of the text as "Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Abū l-Faraj al-Qāsimī al-Ashʿarī al-Dimashqī al-Naqshbandī al-Khālidī al-Shāfiʿī",[8] which implies that he still associated himself with the Naqshbandī Sufi order.

However, Qāsimī's identification with a Sufi order should not surprise us, considering that such orders were found everywhere in Damascus at this time.[9] In late Ottoman Islam, Sufism flourished—as it had for centuries—among the elites and among the masses, having become an integral part of Ottoman religious life.[10] Sufi *shaykh*s represented an established religious authority, in some ways even more so than the non-Sufi *ʿulamāʾ*. In fact, most of the so-called "Salafis" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a clear Sufi background. Qāsimī's favorable view of the writings of such celebrated Sufis as Ghazālī (d. 1111) or Ibn ʿArabī is a product of this very environment, and he, like other Salafis, was well versed in the esoteric and ascetic writings of Sufi scholars.

Qāsimī was first introduced to Sufism by Muḥammad al-Khānī (d. 1898), the leading *shaykh* of the Naqshbandī order with whom he also studied from 1885-1891, calling him "one of the most respected *shaykh*s from whom I benefited [by attending] their lessons, emulating their manners and being blessed by accompanying them."[11] It was due to his association with Khānī that Qāsimī was introduced to Sufi *dhikr* ceremonies, as well as to the writings of Ibn ʿArabī. Nevertheless, he later left Khānī's circle for unspecified reasons (*li-amrin mā*) which may have been a result of the general spread of the rationalist ideas and attitudes that were prominent during this time.[12]

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[8] Nizār Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī,* 304.

[9] For a detailed discussion of the widespread of Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman world from the second half of the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, see Dina Le Gall, *A Culture of Sufism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005).

[10] Sedgwick, "In Search of a Counter-Reformation", 126.

[11] Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-ʿaṣruhū* (Damascus: Maktaba Atlas, 1965), 27.

[12] Ibid. See also Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 278.

His abandonment of the Naqshbandī path did not prevent Qāsimī from maintaining a deep reverence for his old master, and he continued to visit Khānī, who cherished him and paid him increasing respect. At this point in time he was more inclined to the study of *ḥadīth*, a field that connected him with Aḥmad al-Shāttī (d.1898), and through him probably also with the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya. Moreover, he became a close associate of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Bayṭār (d. 1917), Aḥmad al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1902), Ṭāhir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1920) and others who had been known for their reformist ideas and activities.[13] It was this intellectual environment in Damascus that led Qāsimī to turn to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya. Besides, Qāsimī extended his intellectual networks abroad by establishing ties with the reformist Alūsī family of Baghdad, and also with Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) in Egypt. In 1903 he, along with Bayṭār, visited Egypt and met with both of them. During his four-week stay in Cairo, he saw ʿAbduh frequently and attended a number of his lessons at al-Azhar. Upon his return to Damascus, Qāsimī prepared a summary of Ghazālī's masterpiece *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* as recommended by ʿAbduh.

Taking into account the networks of scholars that he established and engaged, it seems clear that Qāsimī did not derive his vision of the Salafiyya from Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā as Skovgaard-Peterson claims.[14] Instead, this influence came more directly through the Alūsī family in Baghdad, with whom he had associated before he made the acquaintance of ʿAbduh and Riḍā. The importance of the Alūsīs on Qāsimī's thought is evident in the newly published correspondence between him and Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī (d. 1924).[15] In fact, Qāsimī's defense of Ibn ʿArabī can be traced back to the view of Abū l-Thanāʾ al-Alūsī (d. 1854), the grandfather of Maḥmūd Shukrī, who is nowadays generally claimed as "one of the influential ancestors of

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[13] Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 108f.

[14] "The Syrian scholar, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866-1914) is one of the most important representatives in Damascus of the well-known reform movement, Salafiya, which derives from Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ʿAbduh." See Jakob Skovgaard-Peterson, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwās of the Dar al-Iftā* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 84.

[15] See Muḥammad b. Nāṣir al-ʿAjmī (ed.), *al-Rasāʾil al-mutabādila bayna Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2001).

modern Salafiyya".[16] Abū l-Thanā' was well-known for his endeavors to revive the intellectual legacy of Ibn Taymiyya. Yet, in spite of the fact that he embraced a range of Ibn Taymiyya's ideas and wrote a treatise on his virtues, Abū l-Thanā' remained convinced of Ibn 'Arabī's saint-hood (*walāya*) and believed in the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. His son, Nu'mān Khayr al-Dīn al-Alūsī (d. 1899), wrote a treatise entitled *Jalā' al-'aynayn fī muḥākamat al-Aḥmadayn* (Revealing to the Eyes the Trial of the Two Aḥmads) which was intended to defend Ibn Taymiyya against the severe attack of one of his major detractors, the sixteenth-century Shāfi'ī scholar Aḥmad b. Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 1567).[17] Nevertheless, his defense of Ibn Taymiyya did not stop him from expressing his disagreement with the latter concerning the mystical thought of Ibn 'Arabī.

Unlike his model, then, Nu'mān Alūsī did not denounce Ibn 'Arabī. Instead, he claimed to exonerate him of any charges of heresy:

> I am among those who think well of the greatest master Muḥyī l-Dīn [Ibn 'Arabī] and do not count myself among his detractors, although I am among those who forbid reading those of his books whose literal expressions contradict the *sharī'a*.[18]

Elsewhere he embarked on a delicate and elaborate reconstruction of the various understandings of Ibn 'Arabī's idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Nu'mān divided the *'ulamā'* into three categories with respect to their approaches to Ibn 'Arabī : (1) those who called him a heretic because of his utterances that contradict the *sharī'a*, (2) those who regarded him among the great saints (*awliyā'*) and *mujtahidīn*, and (3) those who trusted his sainthood but were cautious of his works.[19] Nu'mān's own position seems to have been that Ibn 'Arabī's work should not be

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[16] Basheer M. Nafi, "Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi: an Alim, Ottoman Mufti, and Exegete of the Qur'an", *IJMES*, 34 (2002), 466.

[17] For a detailed discussion of this, see Basheer M. Nafi, "Salafism Revived: Nu'mān al-Alūsī and the Trial of Two Aḥmads", *WI*, 49 (2009), 49-97.

[18] Nu'mān Khayr al-Dīn al-Alūsī, *Jalā' al-'aynayn fī muḥākamat Aḥmadayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n. d.), 68. See also Itzchak Weismann, "Genealogies of Fundamentalism: Salafi Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Baghdad", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 36 (2009), 274.

[19] Nu'mān Alūsī, *Jalā' al-'aynayn*, 69-78.

discarded altogether because "some of his ideas have been widely accepted and are attested by reason (*maʿqūl*) and textual evidence (*manqūl*)."[20] It seems reasonable to argue that the Alūsī family exerted tremendous influence on Qāsimī's approach to Sufism, especially in his defense of Ibn ʿArabī. Qāsimī belongs to what Itzchak Weismann has called "the Salafiyya [which] was not a merely offshoot of the Modernist trend in Cairo, but rather a separate trend that emerged among the reformist-minded *ʿulamā* in the Arab provinces of the late Ottoman Empire."[21] As we will see later, Qāsimī's view of Ibn ʿArabī differs significantly from that of ʿAbduh and Riḍā.

Within the reformist circles of Damascus at that time, Qāsimī was the most prolific writer. It is reported that he wrote more than a hundred books, chief among them a Qurʾān commentary called *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl* and a *ḥadīth* work entitled *Qawāʿid al-taḥdīth*. His literary abilities are further highlighted by the fact that he composed a short biography of the Prophet Muḥammad during a four-week stay in Cairo which was also praised by Riḍā in his journal *al-Manār* a few months later. The coverage which he received in Riḍā's journal broadened Qāsimī's audience, making him known far beyond Damascus and Beirut.[22] Nonetheless, Qāsimī's call for *ijtihād* in his writings had caused him to suffer persecution at the hand of some official *ʿulamā* in Damascus, since religious reform threatened the latter's authority. When Qāsimī published a collection of epistles on "the principles of jurisprudence" (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) which included Ibn ʿArabī's advocacy of *ijtihād* and rejection of *taqlīd*, some official *ʿulamā* accused him of harming society by departing from the "accepted schools" of legal thought. Tensions between Qāsimī and the mainstream *ʿulamā* took off in 1906 when Qāsimī published a chapter on legal theory from Ibn ʿArabī's *magnum opus, al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. The publication disturbed the conservatives because the selections put forth principles that deviated from those of the four recognized legal schools. At the same time this article won the attention of progressive-minded scholars and students,

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[20] Ibid., 75.

[21] See Itzchak Weismann, "Between Sufi Reformism and Modernist Rationalism—A Reappraisal of the Origins of the Salafiyya from the Damascus Angle", *WI*, 41 (2001), 208.

[22] Commins, *Islamic Reform,* 62.

and after its publication many sought out Qāsimī to discuss his ideas with him.

However, the conservative *ʿulamāʾ* were taunted by the excerpt from Ibn ʿArabī's work. Asʿad al-Sāḥib, a *shaykh* of the Naqshbandī order, tried to convince the Ottoman governor to punish Qāsimī for publishing these essays. Sāḥib complained to Shukrī Pasha, the military governor of Aleppo, that the essays did great harm, and he reminded him that the last governor had threatened to exile Qāsimī for advocating *ijtihād*.[23] Sāḥib was likely referring to an 1895 incident known as the "mujtahids' incident" (*ḥādithat al-mujtahidīn*), when a number of official *ʿulamāʾ* accused Qāsimī of advocating an independent *madhhab* known as the "madhhab Jamālī", that is, his own legal school apart from the four recognized *madhhab*s.[24] Qāsimī was summoned to the court and later detained at the police station. During the interrogation in front of a special investigative committee, Qāsimī was asked about his involvement in the circle of Salafi reformists and whether he and other Salafis rejected the legal opinions of the authoritative *imām*s. He was also questioned about his commentary of a work by the Egyptian Sufi ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī (d. 1565), entitled *Kashf al-ghumma*.[25] Shaʿrānī was held in contempt by the mainstream *ʿulamāʾ* because he, like the Salafis, opposed an extreme partisanship for one's legal school and blind adherence to the legal arguments of its founding scholars. Additionally, Shaʿrānī strongly condemned the view that the founders of the *madhhab*s had direct access to divine knowledge and, therefore, stated that they could not be considered infallible (*maʿṣūm*). He was also known for his opposition to the Ottoman judicial system in Egypt and considered the office of *qāḍī* (judge) and *muḥtasib* (market inspector) as suspect on religious grounds.[26]

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[23] Ibid., 112f.

[24] Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 116; Commins, *Islamic Reform,* 50-55.

[25] For a discussion of Shaʿrānī and his influence among elite intellectual groups in Syria, see Leila Hudson, "Reading al-Shaʿrānī: The Sufi Genealogy of Islamic modernism in Late Ottoman Damascus", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 15 (2004), 39-68. On Shaʿrānī's view of Ibn ʿArabī, see Richard McGregor, "Notes on the Transmission of Mystical Philosophy: Ibn ʿArabī according to Abd al-Wahhab al-Shaʾrani", in Todd Lawson (ed.), *Reason and Inspiration in Islam* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 380-394.

[26] Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1982), 242.

While the "mujtahids' incident" did not vindicate Salafiyya *per se*, it certainly brought Qāsimī a measure of celebrity he had not enjoyed before. For the purpose of historical reconstruction, it can be said with some confidence that the report of the *mujtahids*' incident taking place in 1895 indicates that Qāsimī entered the circle of Salafiyya some time before that year. He turned to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and followed him in vehemently attacking Sufi *shaykh*s, describing them in the most emphatic words as electric wires that generate spiritual madness and melancholy among the people, and we also find him denouncing certain Sufi practices, such as extreme asceticism, self-mortification, and especially the visiting of saints' tombs in pursuance of their intercession with God. Nevertheless, Qāsimī's biography and writings make it evident that Sufism still held a central place in his reform program and he did not reject it as a whole. As the mouthpiece of the emerging Salafiyya in Damascus, Qāsimī offered a new attitude toward Sufism while at the same time embracing the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya.[27]

Qāsimī and His Works on Sufism

When Qāsimī died in 1914, Rashīd Riḍā wrote an article in *al-Manār* defending Qāsimī against those who accused him of not being reformist enough. For Riḍā, Qāsimī followed and promoted the way of the *salaf* (*madhhab al-salaf*) in his thought and works. "Qāsimī sought moderation (*iʿtidāl*) and fairness (*inṣāf*) in matters of differences", wrote Riḍā, "he also followed whatever the textual evidence (*dalīl*) led him to without disgracing or declaring the opponent as evil."[28] However, the middle way that Qāsimī chose, Riḍā argued, had put him in a difficult situation. In fact he was labelled by protagonists of each of the two extreme sides of belonging to the other one. For instance, some of the Salafis accused him of contradicting the way of the *salaf* in his book entitled *Tārīkh al-jahmiyya wa-l-muʿtazila* for his apparently sympathetic attitude toward the Jahmiyya. Qāsimī was also attacked by some Shīʿīs even before the book was published. On this contro-

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[27] Weismann, "Between Sufi Reformism and Modernist Rationalism", 219.

[28] Rashīd Riḍā, "Shaykh Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī", *al-Manār*, 8, 17 (1914), 633.

versy, Riḍā noted: "No one has ever written a book on Muslim sects which is more moderate than his."[29] It is worth mentioning that Riḍā's assessment of Qāsimī's moderation is based mainly on the *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd*, without reference, however, to the chapter on *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*.

Rashīd Riḍā was not alone in his irreverence of Qāsimī's chapter on *buṭlān al-ḥulūl wa-l-ittiḥād*, and recent scholarship has similarly overlooked much of Qāsimī's views and writings about Sufism. Both David Commins and Itzchak Weismann only briefly discuss Qāsimī's attitude toward Sufism, arguing that "Qāsimī recorded his only explicit statement on Sufism as a body of thought in an unpublished notebook."[30] Weismann states that "Qāsimī rarely discussed Sufism and, in the few cases in which he did so, he followed Ibn Taymiyya in vehemently attacking the shaykhs of the popular orders."[31] Accordingly, they fail to discuss Qāsimī's view of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* which he puts forth in the *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd* which Riḍā actually acknowledged as one of Qāsimī's most significant works. One year after its first publication in 1908, Riḍā wrote in *al-Manār* a brief review of it, saying that in it Qāsimī presented an original reading of the works of such philosophers and theologians as Ibn Miskawaih, Ṭūsī, Farābī, Ibn Rushd, Ghazālī, Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, Ibn Taymiyya, and ʿAbduh.

In addition to the chapter on *buṭlān al-ḥulūl wa-l-ittiḥād* and the unpublished notebook to which Commins alludes above, Qāsimī provides a lengthy discussion on many aspects of Sufi practices that he considered as reprehensible innovation (*bidʿa*) in his *Iṣlāḥ al-masājid*. As will be discussed later, this book not only rejects certain Sufi practices in Syria's mosques and elsewhere, but also deals with what he considered as the accepted version of Sufism. For the moment it suffices to say that Qāsimī did not make a sweeping generalization in his rejection of certain Sufi practices, but rather explained the extent to which those practices depart from early Sufi teachings. It is therefore difficult to accept

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[29] Ibid., 634.
[30] Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 80. Weismann acknowledges that his account of Qāsimī is primarily based on Commins' work. See Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 291-298.
[31] Weismann, "Between Sufi Reformism and Modernist Rationalism", 219.

Commins' assertion that Qāsimī did not devote much discussion on Sufism except "in an unpublished notebook". It seems that Qāsimī was not an exception among Muslim reformers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were attracted to Sufism in their earlier life and later on became critical of the excesses of some Sufi orders. Some of his other writings also reflect his concern about what he perceived as outrageous in popular Sufi practice.

In 1901, Qāsimī published a book called *al-Awrād al-ma'thūra*, in which he addresses the common practices among the Sufi orders of his time, such as reciting new compositions during the ritual procession. As Nizār Abāzā notes in his biographical work on Qāsimī, "this book was written to refute several books on the same subject that were far away from the tradition (*sunna*)."[32] Qāsimī also wrote a book called *Muntakhab al-tawaṣṣulāt*, published in 1902, which was also an attempt to deter Muslims from non-traditional forms of prayer.[33] In another work, *Maw'iẓat al-mu'minīn min iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn,* he attempted to revive acceptable aspects of Sufi teachings as found in Ghazālī's *magnum opus*, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, which he summarizes. Nonetheless, he censors the text, omitting strange stories and weak *ḥadīth*s, while weaving discussions of Salafi views into the text. In his introduction, Qāsimī acknowledged that it was Muḥammad 'Abduh, the grand mufti of Egypt, who suggested to him to write this book.[34] It thus seems plausible that Qāsimī wrote *Maw'iẓat al-mu'minīn min iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* in order to make Ghazālī's masterpiece more accessible to the general public as an example of legitimate Sufism.

We can infer from this brief exploration that Qāsimī's writings on Sufism can be divided into two categories. Some of his works criticize certain Sufi practices since he thought they deviated from the pristine teachings of Islam and the practices of the early Sufis. Qāsimī was careful not to target any specific group of people, for instance, by naming them. Instead he chose to target certain practices. His other works are concerned with reviving the "true" teachings and doctrines of Sufis, as

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[32] Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 255.

[33] Ibid., 278.

[34] See Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maw'iẓat al-mu'minīn min iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Damascus: Dār b. Kathīr, 2001), 7f.

can be seen in *Mawʿiẓat al-muʾminīn*. In these writings Qāsimī mentions the names of those Sufis whose teachings and views he wanted to uphold or defend, namely Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī. However, he avoids mentioning names when criticizing individual Sufi *shaykh*s, and instead focuses his criticism on their innovative practices.

In the light of the above analysis, I would disagree with Itzchak Weismann's assertion that Qāsimī acknowledges "Ibn ʿArabī's merits as a theologian and jurist, who espoused views that generally corresponded with those of the Salafis' in the matters of *tawḥīd* and *ijtihād*, rather than as a Sufi."[35] Elsewhere, Weismann even writes: "the attempt to present Ibn ʿArabī's eminence as resting on theology and jurisprudence rather than on Sufism is a clear indication that Qāsimī no longer regarded the Akbari theosophy as an adequate basis for the reform of Islam."[36] As will be discussed later, especially with a reference to his chapter on *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, Qāsimī clearly defended Ibn ʿArabī as a Sufi against the severe attacks of Ibn Taymiyya, rather than as a theologian or jurist, as Weismann claims. It seems clear that he regarded Ibn ʿArabī as an authoritative source of Sufism and hence used his works to attack the excessive tendencies found in popular Sufi practices. It is this appreciation of Ibn ʿArabī's theosophical thought that makes Qāsimī distinct from other Salafis' approaches to Sufism.

In Defense of Ibn ʿArabī

Qāsimī's views on Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī deserve further elaboration and contextualization as they tell us about his position with regard to Sufism. Viewing the Sufis with a somewhat moderate approach characterized his entire thought; as Weismann notes, "he sought to delineate a middle way between their opponents, who conclude from their utterances that they were infidels, and their admirers, who regard their path as the essence and goal of Islam."[37] Since Ibn ʿArabī has usually been associated with the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, although he never used the term, it is understandable that Qāsimī alluded to him in his

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[35] Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 294.

[36] Weismann, "Between Sufi Reformism and Modernist Rationalism", 219.

[37] Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 294.

discussion on the invalidity of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*. It is striking that Qāsimī not only defended Ibn ʿArabī, but also cited him as an opponent of these ideas. We will first examine what Qāsimī meant by them and see whether the two terms are somehow related to the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and then discuss Ibn ʿArabī's position as expounded in the *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd* as well as in Qāsimī's unpublished notebook. We will also identify issues where he disagreed with Ibn Taymiyya concerning the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* and then look at the grounds of his critique of Ibn Taymiyya.

Qāsimī gave various descriptive definitions of the term *ittiḥād,* however, he did not explain what he meant by *ḥulūl.* Thus, it cannot be excluded that he viewed *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* as synonymous. From the point of view of Islamic mysticism, *ittiḥād* is generally understood as "the mystical union of the soul with God."[38] As Ibn ʿArabī defines it, "*ittiḥād* takes place when two essences become one, whether servant or Lord",[39] which suggests a mystical union in which one essence is subsumed or annihilated in the other. Qāsimī argued that *ittiḥād* could be understood in three ways. First, "a thing that becomes something else without losing anything from it, which is absolutely impossible for both God and the other."[40] He based his argument on the ground that the infusion of two things falls into three possibilities: the two things still remain, and hence there is no infusion; both are annihilated (*faniya*), and hence become non-existent (*maʿdūm*); or one thing is annihilated and the other remains, which also means that there is no infusion. Second, *ittiḥād* could also mean the unification of two things out of which emerges a single reality (*ḥaqīqa wāḥida*), in such a way that the two become one single unique being.[41] Third, "something becomes something else by way of transformation or transubstantiation (*istiḥāla*), either in its essence or form as it is said that water turns to air or white becomes black; all of these descriptions are absurd for God."[42]

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[38] R. Nicholson, "Ittiḥād", in *EI²*, 4, 283.

[39] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1968), vol. 2, 130.

[40] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 1986), 83.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

The last category of *ittiḥād* is challenged by Qāsimī from different points of view, in most cases by utilizing theological or philosophical arguments. He holds, for instance, that the notion of mixture (*imtizāj*) between human and God is impossible because of their very different natures: God is eternal while mankind is temporal. He also argued that the change in both essence and form is impossible for God "because we cannot ascribe any corporeal parts to God." It seems that his discussion on *ittiḥād* was merely theological. However, Qāsimī argues that the mystical union intended by the early Sufis was not this kind of *ittiḥād*. It is interesting to note that he cites Ibn ʿArabī to support his contention against the idea of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*. Nevertheless, whether Ibn ʿArabī was really against the idea of *ittiḥād* is a different question, because Qāsimī did not refer to Ibn ʿArabī's own writings but rather quoted him from a secondary source. In the footnote for the citation of Ibn ʿArabī's viewpoint he said: "This is cited by Shaʿrānī in his *al-Yawāqīt*."[43]

Let us now examine Qāsimī's presentation of Ibn ʿArabī's views and his claim that the Shaykh Akbar was on his side, and then discuss briefly Ibn ʿArabī's idea of *ittiḥād* by looking at his own writings. Ibn ʿArabī is cited by Qāsimī as having said:

> No one has said anything about *ittiḥād* except *ahl al-ilḥād* [unbelievers]. Similarly, those who said something about *ḥulūl* are *ahl al-jahl wa-l-fuḍūl* [people of ignorance and excess].[44]

For Ibn ʿArabī, as presented by Qāsimī, a human being will never be able to unite with his/her Creator because the idea of *ittiḥād* implies that God departs from His being God, and eventually becoming a creature, and that the creature becomes God. In his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya,* Ibn ʿArabī argues that *ittiḥād* is a meaningless concept because it rests on a false assumption that there is anything other than the One Essence.[45]

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[43] Ibid., 84. Much of Shaʿrānī's work is dedicated to the defense of Ibn ʿArabī and to the popularization of his legacy.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 2, 130.

It might be correct that both terms, *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, are specifically rejected by Ibn ʿArabī, at least in the meaning that is given to them by their critics. This, however, is not the whole story, since there are situations in which Ibn ʿArabī claims that the declaration of *ittiḥād* is not only permissible but necessary for the Sufi to profess.[46] In the *Futūḥāt*'s chapter on love, referring to the *ḥadīth qudsī* on the servant's hearing, seeing, speaking, and all his faculties, he describes the goal of spiritual love as *ittiḥād*, in which the essence of the Beloved becomes the essence of the lover. The sense of unification between the lover and the Beloved is later explained in terms of natural love, in which lovers exchange breath, that is, spirits, and saliva in intimate embrace.

> When this breath becomes the spirit in the one toward which it is transferred and the breath of the other becomes the spirit of the first, it is interpreted as unification (*ittiḥād*). [...] So it is correct to say: "I am the one I love, the one I love is me."[47]

In other words, Ibn ʿArabī's view of *ittiḥād* is more complex than the one presented by Qāsimī. What is significant here is the way in which he dissociated Ibn ʿArabī completely from two main heresies of belief in *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, a charge commonly made in polemical literature against Sufi excesses.

The mystical union as envisioned by the early Sufis, Qāsimī argued, is "not a real union (*ittiḥād ḥaqīqī*) but rather the union with respect to divine manifestation."[48] It is in this context that Qāsimī justified Ibn ʿArabī's idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* by alluding to the latter's famous metaphor of the mirror (*mirʾāt*). In his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* Ibn ʿArabī says:

> A divine self-manifestation occurs only in a form conforming to the essential predisposition of the recipient of such manifestation. Thus, the recipient sees nothing other than his own form in the mirror of the Reality (*al-ḥaqq*) [....] In seeing your true self, He is your mirror and you are His mirror in which

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[46] Ibn ʿArabī's view of *ittiḥād*, as on other issues, is not straightforward, but paradoxical. For a good discussion on Ibn ʿArabī's idea of *ittiḥād*, see the commentary on his work *Ittiḥād al-kawn* by Angela Jaffray, *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2006).

[47] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya,* vol. 2, 334.

[48] Qāsimī, *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd,* 84.

He sees His names and their determinations, which are nothing other than Himself.[49]

Thus, one can only see oneself in the mirror that is God, although this image is in essence a contingent or partial divine self-manifestation. Michael Sells describes the Sufi use of this metaphor of the polishing of the mirror "as a symbol of the shift beyond the distinction between subject and object, self and other."[50] Qāsimī cited it to suggest that the mystical union as envisioned by Ibn ʿArabī is neither the real *ittiḥād* nor *ḥulūl*, for the image of the human in the mirror is not the human himself.[51] In other words, the union is metaphorical, since only God truly exists. It is not clear to what extent Qāsimī may at times have either misunderstood Ibn ʿArabī or wished to take a deliberately different line on certain key issues in order to gain greater credence in a conservative society. But one thing is apparent: the metaphor of the mirror, for Qāsimī, does not invalidate Ibn ʿArabī's idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, a doctrine that had come under severe criticism. One of Ibn ʿArabī's influential critics, Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390), argued that "the Sufi espousers of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*, unlike their orthodox predecessors who never ventured into metaphysical speculations, insist that their subjective experiences mirror the real state of affairs in the universe."[52] Taftāzānī composed a lengthy polemical treatise against the erroneous assumptions peculiar to the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. For him, the position of the proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* comes round to that of the Christians.[53]

It was Ibn Taymiyya who established the link between the idea of *ittiḥād* and Ibn ʿArabī by tracing this theory back to the his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*—a work in which the doctrine of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, which was only incipient in the ecstatic ravings of al-Ḥallāj and al-Bisṭāmī, is

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[49] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* ed. Abū l-ʿAlā ʿAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 2002), 61f.

[50] Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63.

[51] Qāsimī, *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd*, 84.

[52] Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 150.

[53] L. Massignon, "Ḥulūl", in *EI²*, 3, 571.

brought to fruition.[54] The Shaykh al-Islām interpreted Ibn ʿArabī 's teaching as a monism that collapses a proper distinction between God and His creatures and makes God identical to creation. Interestingly, what Ibn Taymiyya condemned was not Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, for he claimed that he was no less an admirer of this great work than anybody else who considered its reading to be a spiritually beneficial exercise. Instead, he chose Ibn ʿArabī 's single volume book *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* as his target of criticism.[55] Using his notion of "correct Sufism" as his measuring stick, Ibn Taymiyya singled out what he viewed as Ibn ʿArabī's tendency to obfuscate the critical demarcation between God and man as the starting point of his anti-monistic critique. He often referred to the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, even employing it in the title of two of his treatises: *Ibṭāl waḥdat al-wujūd wa-l-radd ʿalā l-qāʾilīn bi-hā* (Nullification of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the Rejection of Those Who Support It) and *Risāla ilā man saʾalahū ʿan ḥaqīqat madh-hab al-ittiḥādiyyīn, ay al-qāʾilīn bi-waḥdat al-wujūd* (Treatise Written to the One Who Asked Him about the Reality of the Position of the Unificationists, That Is, of Those Who Support *waḥdat al-wujūd*).[56] It

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[54] Ibn Taymiyya divides the *ittiḥād* into two categories: *ittiḥād ʿāmm* (general union) and *ittiḥād khāṣṣ* (specific union). The former indicates an identification of God with the whole universe at an existential level, while in the latter God enters into union with holy individuals. As for the *ḥulūl*, according to Ibn Taymiyya, God takes up residence in some persons or designates that person as the locus of His activity and presence in the universe. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil wa-l-masāʾil,* ed. Rashīd Riḍā (Cairo: Maktabat al-Manār, 1922-30)*,* vol. 1, 76-80.

[55] Ibn Taymiyya says himself: "At first I was among those who held a good opinion of Ibn ʿArabī and praised him highly for the useful advice he provides in his books. This useful advice is found in the pages of the 'Revelations' (*Futūḥāt*) […] and similar writings. At that time, we were unaware of his real goal, because we had not yet studied the *Fuṣūṣ* and such like books." Citation from Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 96. However, it was precisely because the *Fuṣūṣ* was controversial, in addition to it being brief and difficult, that it became a kind of template for the philosophical speculations and elaborations of his school. *Fuṣūṣ* commentaries were written by a number of scholars, including Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, Qūnawī's disciple Muʾayyad al-Dīn Jandī, Jandī's disciple ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, Kāshānī's disciple Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, in a continuous line of spiritual and intellectual succession. Later commentaries include those of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmīʿ and ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī.

[56] Ibn Taymiyya wrote a number of refutations of the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, several of which are found in his *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil wa-l-masāʾil*. These include: *Ibṭāl waḥdat al-wujūd* (vol. 1, 61-120); *Kitāb Shaykh al-islām ilā l-ārif bi-llāh al-Shaykh Naṣr al-Manbijī* (vol. 1,

is particularly significant that in the second of these titles Ibn Taymiyya identified "oneness of being" with "unification" (*ittiḥād*). He repeated this identification in many passages of his works, often adding the term "incarnation" (*ḥulūl*) as a second near synonym.

For Ibn Taymiyya, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is nothing else than *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl,* and it is equivalent to atheism (*ilḥād*), heresy (*zandaqa*), and unbelief (*kufr*).[57] He sums up his objections to the proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* by claiming that they deny the basic principles of the religion: They have no faith in God, in His prophets, or in the Last Day. He contended:

> As for faith in God, they think that His *wujūd* is identical with the *wujūd* of the cosmos and that the cosmos has no other maker than the cosmos itself. Furthermore, these people think that they have more knowledge of God than God's Messenger and all the other prophets. Some claim to take knowledge of God—that is, *waḥdat al-wujūd* and atheism (*taʿṭīl*)—from the Prophet's lamp.[58]

In several polemical passages, Ibn Taymiyya directly equates *waḥdat al-wujūd* with the Christian theory of incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and union (*ittiḥād*) between man and the divine, which he regards as a form of polytheism, or sheer atheism (*ilḥād*, *taʿṭīl*). Here it becomes clear that, by citing *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *taʿṭīl* as parallel terms, he is in fact equating the two. *Taʿṭīl* is variously defined in theological texts and always condemned. Its basic meaning is to consider God divested of His activity, in a way resembling Deist concepts.

We are not in a position to evaluate Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of the Shaykh Akbar's idea. William C. Chittick argues that Ibn Taymiyya "takes a simplistic view of one side of Ibn ʿArabī's teaching—that of similarity of immanence (*tashbīh*)—and completely ignores the other

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161-173), and *Ḥaqīqat madhhab al-ittiḥādiyyīn* (vol. 4, 2-101). For other works and evaluations of Ibn Taymiyya's opinions regarding speculative Sufism, see the useful study by Muḥammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimiya's Struggle Against Popular Religion* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), and Abdul Haq Ansari, "Ibn Taymiyya's Criticism of Sufism", *Islam and the Modern Age*, 15 (August 1984), 147-156.

[57] For a detailed discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of Ibn ʿArabī, see Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the Later Islamic Tradition,* especially chapter 4: "Ibn Taymiyya's Formidable Challenge".

[58] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat*, vol. 4, 73.

side, that of incomparability or transcendence (*tanzīh*)."[59] Ibn ʿArabī often employs paradoxical statements in the form of "He/not He". Michel Chodkiewicz admits that the polemics and controversies over Ibn ʿArabī's ideas from Ibn Taymiyya's time to the present are mainly the result of his language, "[which] is often paradoxical or enigmatic."[60] Ibn ʿArabī himself considered the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* (*jamʿ bayn ʿaḍdād*, or synthesis between opposites) as central to his metaphysics. In the *faṣṣ* of Enoch, he cites Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 899) as having said: "God can only be known through the synthesis between the opposites."[61] As Michael Sells puts it:

> The coming together of the opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*) results logically from any reference to the unlimited. Conversely, it can be interpreted as the means by which language is transformed from referential to *theoria*. The coincidence of the opposites is a form of dialectical logic that plays against and upon the linear logic of delimited reference.[62]

Considering the principle of *coincidentia oppositorum* as the fundamental character of reality, Ibn ʿArabī argued that the *wujūd* of the cosmos can be said to be identical with the *wujūd* of God in one respect, but strictly speaking, the cosmos has no *wujūd*. It is so because, he continued, "Nothing has become manifest in *wujūd* through *wujūd* except the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), since *wujūd* is the Real, and He is one."[63] Ibn Taymiyya strongly rejected Ibn ʿArabī's principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*:

> the synthesis between two opposites in a matter of belief is of utmost corrupt. The two contradictory questions between negative and positive sides mean that the validity of one of them necessitates that the other is wrong and cannot be combined. (*fa-inna al-jamʿ bayn al-mutanāqiḍayn fī l-iʿtiqād fī*

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[59] William C. Chittick, "Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*", in Amin Banani, Richard Hovannisian, and Georges Sabagh (eds.), *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 86.

[60] Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn ʿArabī, the Book, and the Law* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 1f.

[61] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 77.

[62] Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 21.

[63] Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, vol. 2, 517.

ghāyat al-fasād wa-l-qaḍiyyatāni al-mutanāqiḍatāni bi-l-silbi wa-l-ījāb ʿalā wajhin yalzam min ṣidq aḥadihima kidhb al-ākhar lā yumkin al-jamʿ bayna-humā.)[64]

Furthermore, he considered *waḥdat al-wujūd* synonymous with atheism and unbelief because he saw it as a denial of the distinction between God and the cosmos.

Qāsimī was troubled with Ibn Taymiyya's fierce attack that put Ibn ʿArabī amid the cohort of heretics. In spite of his admiration for Ibn Taymiyya, he criticized him for declaring the Shaykh Akbar a heretic, arguing that "one may disagree with him [Ibn ʿArabī] on a particular issue, yet his belief and legal reasoning are sound."[65] Thus Qāsimī denounced in his writings the *ʿulamāʾ's* practice of *takfīr* (declaring others as heretics) and *taḍlīl* (declaring others as astray) in their dispu-tations with their opponents, and called for unity on the basis of gener-ally accepted fundamental religious precepts. He thus showed a strong desire to keep the Muslim community unified and not to commit *tamzīq* (discord) through exclusion and *takfīr*. In his unpublished note-book, he issued warnings against both the detractors of Sufism and the Sufi zealots. The former in his view go too far when they declare the Sufis as unbelievers, forbid the study of Sufism and excommunicate those Sufis whose belief seems to include *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*. As for Sufi zealots, they exaggerate the importance of Sufi masters and devote all their lives to studying Sufi texts.[66] Qāsimī was all too aware of the accu-mulation of misconceptions and perceived a need to respond to them.

Weismann is thus correct stating that "as the mouth-piece of the emerging Salafiyya in Damascus, Qāsimī's writings clarify the essence of the new attitude that this trend adopted toward Sufism while turn-ing to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya."[67] Following his usual inclination to seek a middle position on matters of differences, Qāsimī argued that "we should not declare as unbelievers those who turn their faces toward

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[64] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat*, vol. 1, 81.

[65] Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-ʿaṣruhū*, 274; see also Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 316.

[66] Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-ʿaṣruhū*, 303; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 80.

[67] Weismann, "Between Sufi Reformism and Modernist Rationalism", 219.

our *qibla*, pray the same way as we do our prayers, and believe in what we believe."[68] The Sufis have their own methodology and terminology. Qāsimī maintained, therefore, that those who examine their works will notice that Sufism constitutes a branch of philosophy (*fann al-ḥikma*), though since the authors are people of spiritual training (*riyāḍa*), self-deprivation (*tajrīd*), and asceticism (*tazahhud*), their discourse resembles an Islamic philosophy, not a purely Greek one. Undoubtedly, Sufism might include some errors in its teaching. However, it should be kept in mind that in those days they were part of the accepted truth.[69] Qāsimī would struggle hard in defense of the Shaykh Akbar and all potential proponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, even when their interpretations differed substantially. He made clear that most people understood the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a synonym of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* from the apparent meaning of Sufi utterances. However, he argued that "if one examines their intentions one would find them innocent of such an accusation, for the doctrine of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* is contrary to their principles."[70] Such a positive view of Ibn ʿArabī and his thought allows Qāsimī to include him along with major *ʿulamāʾ* whom the Salafis relied upon, such as Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim, and so forth.

Qāsimī's tolerance of Sufi theosophy contrasted sharply with his attitude toward certain Sufi orders. He attacked what he thought were fake Sufis who led Sufi orders, likening them to electric wires spreading madness among people, reproaching them for feigning epilepsy and for ceaselessly repeating the word "Allāh" without an end, and causing spiritual madness.[71] He also condemned ignorant *shaykh*s who led their followers to such embarrassing Sufi processions as dancing, screaming like madmen, eating fire and playing music. Qāsimī found such spectacles not only repugnant but also humiliating to the pristine teaching of Islam. The greatest catastrophe, according to Qāsimī, are claims made by some Sufi masters that are harmful to Muslim belief and could mislead the public, such as the concept of *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfect

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[68] Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-ʿaṣruhū*, 303.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 304.
[71] Ibid., 353; Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 80.

man) which is taken from the Sufi books without properly understanding it, especially since they claim to understand it through divine revelation and inspiration. These Sufi *shaykh*s distort religion by ascribing super-stitions and blameworthy innovations to it, which even people of other religions would reject.[72]

In order to counter such outrageous practices made popular by some Sufi orders, Qāsimī made frequent references not only to such *ʿulamāʾ* whom the Salafis often relied upon, including Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Qayyim, and Ibn Ḥajar, but also to such well-known Sufi masters as Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī. Of these two, Ghazālī is the most quoted in his *Iṣlāḥ al-masājid,* especially by referring to the *Iḥyāʾ*. Qāsimī's aim was to demonstrate that those ignorant *shaykh*s not only exaggerated the teachings of the early Sufis, but also misunderstood them. He affirmed that the early Sufis were on the right track of the Prophet (*sunna*), the Righteous Caliphs, and their contemporaries. However, when the ignorant pretended to be *shaykh*s (*tashayyakha*) in the Sufi orders, they began practicing certain blameworthy innovations and imitating statements the meaning of which they did not really under-stand.[73] Here we can see how Qāsimī used other pious Sufis to support his critiques against certain Sufi practices. That is to say, he employed, in criticizing popular Sufi practices, the writings of some of the early Sufis.

It is most likely that when Qāsimī referred to early Sufis whom he viewed as legitimate, he would include in this category both Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī. He showed his respect for Ghazālī by his attempt to revive the *Iḥyāʾ* as a means to bring the *umma* back to the essence of Islam and to teach it the beauty of the religion. His admiration for Ibn ʿArabī, in addition to his defense against Ibn Taymiyya's attacks, can be seen in his book *al-Faḍl al-mubīn*, where he writes the biography of Ibn ʿArabī with special attention to his excellent works and influences. As mentioned earlier, Qāsimī also edited an excerpt from a work by Ibn ʿArabī on legal theory, along with the works of Ṭūfī and Suyūṭī, because he "thought it important to publish the chapter because it would

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[72] Qāsimī, *Iṣlāḥ al-masājid min al-aida' wa-l-ʿawāʾid* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, 1922), 248ff.
[73] Ibid., 250.

acquaint Ibn ʿArabī's many admirers among the conservative *ʿulamāʾ* with his opinion on legal theory, especially his critique of emulation, advocacy of *ijtihād*, and adherence to the Ẓāhirī school of jurisprudence."[74]

With this high respect for both Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī, did he consider them to belong to the *salaf*? There is no explicit statement to that effect. However, in treating the Salafis' idea about what constitutes the *salaf*, I would argue that Qāsimī's view seems to be closer to ʿAbduh's approach than to that of Riḍā. As Albert Hourani notes, one of the significant differences between ʿAbduh and Riḍā was over their views concerning the *salaf*. ʿAbduh used this category broader than Riḍā, taking them to include "the creators of the central tradition of Muslim thought and devotion, from the Prophet to al-Ghazālī." For Riḍā, the *salaf* were confined to "the first generation [of Muslims] who had known Muḥammad."[75] While ʿAbduh was a somewhat sympathetic to Sufism in general, Riḍā exhibited a rather skeptical attitude towards it and was certainly against the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.[76] Like ʿAbduh, Qāsimī seemed to understand the *salaf* in a broad sense, even broader than ʿAbduh's. Moreover, Qāsimī differed from ʿAbduh on an important point. While the Grand Mufti of Egypt had some reservations with Ibn ʿArabī's works,[77] Qāsimī expressed his appreciation of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas and even defended him against the Shaykh al-Islām's critiques. He also disagreed with ʿAbduh as he himself recorded it:

> ʿAbduh seems to interpret verse 15 of Sūrat al-Nisāʾ: "*If any of your women are guilty of lewdness*" in the way similar to the one provided by Abū Muslim al-Iṣfahānī which is related by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. However, I do not agree

[74] Commins, *Islamic Reform,* 112, 171, n. 33.

[75] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 230.

[76] Rashīd Riḍā, *Tārīkh al-ustādh al-imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh* (Egypt: Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, 1931), 123.

[77] Hourani notes that when ʿAbduh was the president of a commission to supervise the publishing of Arabic classics, he refused to allow the publication of Ibn ʿArabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. See Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age,* 150. The reason why ʿAbduh refused to publish the *Futūḥāt* was because he thought of "works of this sort should not be looked at save by those who are qualified", since the symbolism in the works would lead to the uninitiated astray. Cited by Th. Emil Homerin, "Ibn ʿArabi in the People's Assembly: Religion, Press, and Politics in Sadat's Egypt", *MEJ*, 40 (1986), 465.

with his interpretation because it goes against its true interpretation as mentioned in the authentic *ḥadīth*s. [78]

ʿAbduh's "liberal" stance on such controversial issues as the permissibility of limited interest (*ribā*), eating the animal meats slaughtered by Christians, and many other hermeneutical issues, did surprise not only Qāsimī, but also many of his colleagues, including Riḍā himself.[79]

What was, then, the kind of Salafiyya that Qāsimī advocated? When defending Qāsimī against *al-Manār*'s readers who accused him of not being enough of a reformist, Rashīd Riḍā acknowledged that "some of Qāsimī's works might not fall within the field of reform as generally understood by *al-Manār*'s readers."[80] However, he added that the so-called "reform" and its meaning was broad and varied according to differences of time and space. Riḍā discussed at length Qāsimī's tendency toward an independent thinking to the extent that "he was accused of promoting a new *madhhab* in Islam."[81] Qāsimī eagerly sought to strengthen the unity among the Muslims by explaining the position of each *madhhab* and strove to bring them closer to each other. On the one hand, he was independent in such a way that, "however the truth appeared to him he would say it and implement it, even if he had to face the people's wrath." On the other hand, he sought to find a middle way between two extremes that opposed each other by emphasizing

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[78] Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 315f.

[79] For a discussion of ʿAbduh's audacious views, see Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *al-Salafiyya: Marḥala zamaniyya mubāraka lā madhhab islāmī* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 232-235. The most famous of ʿAbduh's *fatwā*s that caused a considerable stir is known as "Transvaal fatwā" in which ʿAbduh answered in the affirmative all three questions posed by a member of the small Muslim community in the Transvaal: (1) Is it permissible for a Muslim in a predominantly Christian country to wear a European-style hat? (2) Is it permissible for him to eat meat slaughtered by Christians according to their own manner, without assurance of conformity to the stipulations of the Qurʾān concerning the method of slaughtering? (3) Is it permissible for Ḥanafīs and Shāfiʿīs to hold public prayer together, led by a single *imām*, despite the differences in ritual between the two schools? For a further discussion of this *fatwā*, see Charles C. Adams, "Muḥammad ʿAbduh and the Transvaal fatwā", *The Macdonald Presentation Volume* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 13-29; Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 145f.

[80] Riḍā, *al-Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 631.

[81] Ibid., 632.

their similarities rather than their differences. "This method of reform", Riḍā argued, "is the best way to appease the moderate among the people of different *madhhab*s, while their fanatics would not be content with it."[82]

Qāsimī's ambivalent appreciation of Ibn Taymiyya's legacy should be read within this context of reconciling different streams of Islamic thought. It was because of his conciliatory approach that led Qāsimī to consider Ibn 'Arabī's teaching quite germane to his goal and, moreover, was eager to incorporate its elements into his own reformist platform. We should keep in mind that the debates between Ibn 'Arabī's champions and antagonists have raged for more than six centuries, dividing the Muslim community into two hostile camps. Therefore, the reconciliatory approach proposed by Qāsimī and earlier reformist Muslims before him, such as the Alūsī family, Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī (d. 1762), Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī (d. 1791), and Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1690), marks an important development in the reformist tradition that envisages what may be called "the middle way" between the two figures, whom the Salafis depicted as prototypes of the contradiction between *sharī'a* and *taṣawwuf*: Ibn Taymiyya, from whose call to follow the path of the forefathers (*salaf*) they derived their name, and Ibn 'Arabī, whom they vehemently rejected. Qāsimī urged his fellow reformist (*muṣliḥ*) that he should "become open-minded (*wāsi' al-ṣadr*) and not averse to those who disagree with him. He should rather approach them in a congenial manner."[83]

Qāsimī, undoubtedly, was tremendously influenced by Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples such as Ibn Qayyim. He took from them what he deemed suitable to this own project of reform. However, his vision of the Salafiyya differs significantly from that of Ibn Taymiyya in his sharp attacks on his adversaries, and from other Salafis who became prone to *takfīr* of other Muslims and divided them into two groups, Salafis and innovators, which led, furthermore, to sectarianism, at a time when they needed the unity and solidarity of the community. Qāsimī's vision of the Salafiyya differs from other Salafis on a number of issues, includ-

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[82] Ibid., 634.

[83] Maḥmūd Mahdī al-Istambūlī, *Shaykh al-Shām Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1984), 80.

ing the question of *takfīr* just mentioned, and his attitude toward Sufism and innovations (*bidaʿ*). In the case of Ibn ʿArabī, Qāsimī urged his fellow Salafis to be careful not to throw at him *takfīr* and other baseless accusations:

> As for Ibn ʿArabī, he argued, the researcher and the opponent have every right to reject a specific issue that accepts no other interpretation, which may seem like an infidel's statement. However, his belief (*ʿaqīda*) and *madhhab* in legal matters are good. Hence, there is no reason to label him as unbeliever (*mulḥid*).[84]

Even if one might consider Ibn ʿArabī's ideas to be innovations (*bidaʿ*), he prefers to call them good innovations open to multiple layers of meanings, and, therefore, not to be charged with atheism (*ilḥād*).[85]

What accounts for Qāsimī's defense of Ibn ʿArabī? Firstly, most Sufi reformers in later Ottoman Syria had been attracted to Ibn ʿArabī's teachings. Chief among them was ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī (d.1731), the most distinguished Sufi in Ottoman Syria who considered himself a "spiritual son of Ibn ʿArabī".[86] Elizabeth Sirriyeh depicts Nābulusī as a "Sufi reformer [who was] able to lead by example as a 'friend of God', perhaps then deserving the title of 'imam of the faith'."[87] From the sixteenth century onwards, Ibn ʿArabī had effectively been recognized by the Ottomans as a saint and it had become quite respectable to study his works. Following his conquest of Syria, Sultan Selim I ordered in 1517-18 the construction of the celebrated mausoleum over the tomb of Ibn ʿArabī; the Shaykh Akbar became valued as the protecting saint of the Ottoman dynasty. Selim's son, Suleyman the Lawgiver (known to Europeans as "the Magnificent"), prevented any efforts to disparage Ibn ʿArabī as a heretic or unbeliever.[88] Qāsimī lived in an environment where Ibn ʿArabī had for a long time exerted tremendous influence.

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[84] Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-ʿaṣruhū*, 274.

[85] Ibid.

[86] For a detailed discussion of al-Nābulusī and his association with Ibn ʿArabī, see Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005); Barbara Rosenow von Schlegell, *Sufism in the Ottoman Arab World: Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghānī al-Nābulusī* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1997).

[87] Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus*, 134.

[88] Ibid., 8.

Even the most vociferous critic of philosophical Sufism, Ibn Taymiyya, was ready to concede:

> Of all the exponents of *waḥdat al-wujūd* Ibn ʿArabī is the nearest of them to Islam, the one whose speech is best in many places. He distinguishes between the Manifest (*ẓāhir*) and the objects of manifestations (*maẓāhir*). He affirms the divine commanding and forbidding as well as the revealed religions against what is put forward against them. He has commanded the following of much of what the *shaykh*s have prescribed by way of moral and religious duties. Many religious people have thereby taken their path from his teaching, and have benefited from it although they do not know its true nature.[89]

Here we can see that despite such a condemnation of Ibn ʿArabī's concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, Ibn Taymiyya refrains from the *ad hominem* attacks that could be found on the lips or flowing from the pens of so many of Ibn Taymiyya's disciples in subsequent generations. In his eyes, Ibn ʿArabī was not as insisting as other Sufis on the issue of absolute monism, and he even praised him for respecting the law and paying careful attention to the Sufi path.[90]

Secondly, through Qāsimī's scholarly networks we can see that he was very much engaged in the Naqshbandiyya-Khālidiyya through his teacher, al-Khānī. The Naqshbandiyya was the leading reformist order in Damascus in the first of half of the nineteenth century that paid much interest in the doctrines of Ibn ʿArabī. Most of the major figures in late Ottoman Damascus with whom Qāsimī studied were under the influence of Ibn ʿArabī. As mentioned earlier, Qāsimī established a special relationship with Aḥmad al-Jazāʾirī, a brother of the leading Sufi reformer ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī who belonged to the spiritual chain of the Shaykh Akbar. ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jazāʾirī (d. 1883) was the leader of the resistance movement to the French occupation of Algeria, who in the last part of his life chose Damascus as his place of residence. Both Michel Chodkiewicz and Itzchak Weismann have shown ʿAbd al-Qādir's

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[89] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat*, vol. 1, 176. For a detailed discussion of this, see Ansari, "Ibn Taymiyya's Criticism", 148. See also Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabī in the later Islamic Tradition*, 98.
[90] Th. Emil Homerin, "Sufis and Their Detractors in Mamluk Egypt", in de Jong & Radtke (eds.), *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, 233.

reliance on the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī, including his affirmation of the principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a concept of mutual relationship between God and His creatures.[91] Aḥmad al-Jazāʾirī himself, who appointed Qāsimī as prayer leader for the ʿAnnaba mosque, had very much the same view of Ibn ʿArabī's concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* as his brother. In 1884/5, Aḥmad al-Jazāʾirī wrote an essay defending the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and explaining "true" Sufism.[92] This undoubtedly had a clear influence on Qāsimī, who praised al-Jazāʾirī's Sufi rituals as "void of the blemishes of innovation".[93] The Alūsī family, especially Abū l-Thanāʾ and Nuʿmān al-Alūsī, whose influences were equally apparent in Qāsimī's approach to Sufism, were explicitly fault-ing any denouncers of Ibn ʿArabī and the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* while at the same time embracing a range of Ibn Taymiyya's ideas. The appear-ance of such a conspicuous defense of Ibn ʿArabī should, therefore, be seen as a major development in the Salafiyya movement, which has usually been viewed as inimical to Sufism. Despite the Salafis' conse-quent diminishing interest in Sufism, they refused to follow Ibn Taymi-yya's attack against Ibn ʿArabī, presenting the two instead as belonging to the same reformist tradition.

Thirdly, Qāsimī's critique of Ibn Taymiyya and his defense of Ibn ʿArabī suggest the possibility of overlapping attitudes, where both a Salafi-inspired belief and Sufi-reformist vision could coexist. What, however, was the background of this critique? The Salafiyya has usually been associated with the intellectual legacy of Ibn Taymiyya. Most of the reformist *ʿulamāʾ*, including Qāsimī, were attracted—in one form or the other—to the Salafi school of thought epitomized by Ibn Taymi-yya and elaborated in his writings. As Commins puts it, "Religious reformers in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and India accorded him the greatest respect, avidly sought his works, and strove to have them published."[94] In the early 1900s, Qāsimī corresponded with the Baghdadi Salafi

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[91] Michel Chodkiewics, *Seal of Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrines of Ibn ʿArabī* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993); Weismann, *Taste of Modernity*, 143-260.

[92] Commins, *Islamic Reform,* 38.

[93] Cited in ibid., 38.

[94] Ibid., 25; see also H. A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 34f.

Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī (d. 1924), and much of their correspondence
dealt with recent discoveries of manuscripts of Ibn Taymiyya.[95] The fact
that Ibn Taymiyya condemned the pantheistic Sufism of *waḥdat
al-wujūd* could easily mislead scholars to conclude that Salafism
and Sufism are inherently opposed each other. It is noteworthy that
recent studies by George Makdisi have suggested that Ibn Taymiyya
himself belonged to a Sufi order, whereas, on the other hand, any
such Sufi connection of Ibn Taymiyya has decisively been rejected by
Fritz Meier.[96]

Given Ibn Taymiyya's notoriety for polemics against the doctrine of
waḥdat al-wujūd, it may seem odd to see the Salafis as having a great
deal of appreciation for Ibn ʿArabī. Yet, in the case of Qāsimī, this
assumption is not true. Although Qāsimī, as many other Salafis, fol-
lowed the footsteps of Ibn Taymiyya, he did not take everything from
him, but rather only what had really impressed him, especially Ibn
Taymiyya's independent thinking. On this issue, Qāsimī confessed:
"Who did say to you that I am a *muqallid* [blind follower] of Ibn
Taymiyya? No. I only defend him and disseminate his works because
he was a *mujtahid*."[97] Further, Qāsimī claimed, "in terms of opinion,
we are independent (*mustaqillūn*) and are neither followers, nor
partisans."[98] With this independent thinking, he was free to reject what-
ever views he deemed contrary to his own thought, including the *takfīr*
and *taḍlīl* tendency of Ibn Taymiyya and later Salafi circles. In his *Dalāʾil*

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[95] See al-ʿAjmī (ed.), *al-Rasāʾil al-mutabādila*.

[96] In support of the view that Ibn Taymiyya was a Sufi, see George Makdisi, "Ibn Taymiyya:
A Study of the Qadiriya Order", *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, 1 (1977), 118-130.
Makdisi also debunked the notion that adherents of the Ḥanbalī legal school reject Sufism;
he showed that many Ḥanbalīs criticized certain Sufi practices but embraced "correct"
Sufism. George Makdisi, "The Ḥanbali School and Sufism", *Humaniora Islamica*, 2 (1974),
61-72. Both of these works are reprinted in George Makdisi, *Religion, Law and Learning
in Classical Islam* (Britain: Variorum, 1991). Against Ibn Taymiyya's being a Sufi, see
F. Meier, "Das Sauberste über die Vorbestimmung. Ein Stück Ibn Taymiyya", *Saeculum*,
32 (1981), 74-89. The English translation of this article can be found in F. Meier, "The
Cleanest about Predestination: A Bit of Ibn Taymiyya", in *Essays on Islamic Piety and
Mysticism,* trans. J. O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

[97] Quoted in al-Istambūlī, *Shaykh al-Shām Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 49; Abāzā, *Jamāl
al-Dīn al-Qāsimi,* 315.

[98] Abāzā, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī,* 333.

al-tawḥīd, he approved, rather, of Ibn ʿArabī's position that "you should not reject outright what Philosophers and Muʿtazilis have said [….] because not everything Philosophers have said is wrong."[99] This is certainly apart from Ibn Taymiyya's position and it might disturb many Salafis.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, let us now situate Qāsimī's position on Sufism within the ongoing discussion about the relationship between the Salafiyya and Sufism in more recent scholarship. It seems that Qāsimī's vision of the Salafiyya is different from that of the "golden trinity" of Afghānī-ʿAbduh-Riḍā in Egypt. Unfortunately, as Thomas Eich has shown, scholarship about the Salafiyya has until very recently been focused exclusively on Egypt.[100] In the early 1960s, Albert Hourani has already alluded to groups of reformers outside Egypt rightly claiming that "perhaps it is too simple to explain them in terms of the influence of Afghani and ʿAbduh."[101] He nevertheless still devoted much of his attention to Egyptian reformist thinkers. Thanks to the works of David Commins, Itzchak Weismann, Thomas Eich, and Basheer Nafi, among others, different Salafi trends in late Ottoman Damascus and Baghdad have come into the limelight as well.[102] These recent studies strongly challenge the idea of a unified beginning of the Salafiyya movements, which has been prevalent in early research on modern Islamic reformism.

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[99] Qāsimī, *Dalāʾil al-tawḥīd*, 129.

[100] See Thomas Eich, "Questioning Paradigms: A Close Reading of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Bayṭār's *Ḥilya* in Order to Gain Some New Insights into Damascene *Salafiyya*", *Arabica*, 52 (2005), 373-390.

[101] It is worth noting that Hourani mentions in passing such reformist Muslims as the scholars of the Alūsī family in Baghdad, the followers of Khayr al-Dīn in Tunisia, Syrian reformer Ṭāhir al-Jazāʾirī, and Shaykh Ḥusayn al-Jisr of Tripoli. See Hourani, *Arabic Thought in Liberal Age,* 222.

[102] On the Damascene Salafiyya, see, for instance, David Commins, "Social Criticism and Reformist ʿUlama of Damascus", *Stud. Isl.*, 78 (1993), 169-180; Weismann, "Between Sufi reformism and Modernist Rationalism", 206-237; Eich, "Questioning Paradigms", 373-390; on the Baghdadi Salafiyya, see, for instance, Hala Fatah, "Wahhabi Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Maḥmud Shukri and the Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745-1930", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 14 (2003), 127-148; Nafi, "Salafism Revived", 49-97.

With more diverse Salafis becoming a subject of scholarly discussion, it is now difficult to accept the hypothesis that the different Salafiyya movements, stretching from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have produced a single, more or less homogenous, body of thought which belongs to an identifiable "fundamentalist mode of Islam".

Of particular relevance to my argument is the lack of a sharp distinction between the Salafiyya and Sufism. Recent debate between Weismann and Eich on the enigmatic figure Abū l-Hudā al-Ṣayyādī (d. 1909) can illustrate this point. Was Abū l-Hudā a Salafi? Eich attempts to question the position of earlier scholarship that portrays Abū l-Hudā as a strong opponent of the Salafiyya. By using both network and textual analyses, Eich is able to bring out a complex picture of Abū l-Hudā who "had good and intensive relations to leading figures of the Salafiyya" in Baghdad and Damascus.[103] Eich further contends that Abū l-Hudā's later writings, especially after 1900, show that "he shared much of the Salafis' opinions."[104] Weismann disagrees with Eich's presentation of Abū l-Hudā and accuses Eich of "adding non-Salafi high status *'ulamā'* of a previous generation to the Salafi camp [….]".[105] The problem with this debate, in my view, lies in its basic assumption that there is a sharp line between Salafiyya and Sufism, and therefore both Eich and Weismann seem to be puzzled by enigmatic figures like Abū l-Hudā who cannot be located easily within an assumed Sufi-Salafi antagonism. This assumption apparently has no roots in the perceptions of Sufism prevailing among the Damascene Salafis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but has rather been shaped by the contemporary view of the sharp contrast between Salafiyya and Sufism, which was then projected back into history.

It is in this context that the Salafi view of Sufism as represented by Qāsimī may have something to tell us about the possibility of overlapping attitudes, where the relationship between Salafiyya and Sufism should not be viewed as hostile as is sometimes supposed. Most scholars, including Weismann and Eich, agree that most Salafi-minded

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[103] Thomas Eich, "The Forgotten Salafi—Abū al-Hudā aṣ-Ṣayyādī", *WI*, 43 (2003), 63.
[104] Ibid., 87.
[105] Itzchak Weismann, "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī and the Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism", *Arabica*, 54 (2007), 588.

'ulamā' had Sufi backgrounds in their early life, and only later became interested in Ibn Taymiyya's teachings. In spite of his disagreement with Weismann, Eich expresses that "We both want to point to the Sufi roots of Islamic reformism in the 19th and 20th centuries."[106] What seems to be problematic is that this turn toward Ibn Taymiyya is often described in the literature as superceding the Salafis' earlier attachment to Sufism. Since scholars are so prone to the clear-cut dichotomy between the Salafiyya and Sufism, this leads them to see this shift a break with the mystical thought of Ibn 'Arabī.[107] The case of Qāsimī's defense of Ibn 'Arabī seems to challenge the general assumption that one cannot adhere to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn 'Arabī at the same time. On a number of important issues, Qāsimī quoted approvingly the views of both Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Taymiyya. His position on this issue is neither unique nor unfounded. As discussed earlier, reformist-minded 'ulamā' such as Abū l-Thanā' al-Alūsī and Nu'mān al-Alūsī held positions similar to that of Qāsimī. Basheer Nafi alludes briefly to Dihlawī, Zabīdī, and Kūrānī, as having a conciliatory Sufi-reformist vision.[108] The latter reformer deserves a further elaboration not only because he was a seminal figure in the pre-modern network of reform-ist-minded 'ulamā' which was centered in Medina, but also because he explicitly defended both Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Taymiyya. According to Nu'mān al-Alūsī, Kūrānī was "a Salafi in his creed who defended Shaykh Ibn Taymiyya and likewise defended those Sufi utterings which outwardly may look like [suggesting] incarnation (ḥulūl), fusion with God (ittiḥād), or becoming identical with Him ('ayniyya)."[109]

To do justice to Qāsimī, we should place his work within this broader historical context. Qāsimī was just one of the many reformist Muslims who sought to exculpate Ibn 'Arabī from the fierce theological attacks

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[106] Thomas Eich, "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī—Still such a Polarizing Figure (Response to Itzchak Weismann)", *Arabica*, 55 (2008), 443.

[107] In his discussion of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jazā'irī, Weismann writes, "'Abd al-Qādir's thought was embedded in the mystical thought of Ibn 'Arabī, which in the Salafi creed was superceded by the teachings of the Hanbali Ibn Taymiyya." See Weismann, "Abū l-Hudā l-Ṣayyādī", 588.

[108] Nafi, "Abu al-Thana' al-Alusi", 466.

[109] Nu'mān Alūsī, *Jalā' al-'aynayn*, 41. For a detailed discussion of Kūrānī's view of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, see Alexander Knysh, "Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d. 1101/1690), an Apologist for *Waḥdat al-wujūd*", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 5 (1995), 39-47.

which denounced him as Islam's great heresiarch. There is no question that Qāsimī regarded Ibn Taymiyya as a model for the latter's strong advocacy for *ijtihād* and rejection of *taqlīd*. However, it seems that Qāsimī's attempts to position himself as an independent thinker in his disscussions about Ibn Taymiyya's views is a clear indication that he did not regard the Shaykh al-Islām's intellectual legacy as an adequate and sufficient basis for Islamic reform. His overall view of Sufism is also complex. While, on the one hand, he despised what he called *ghulūw* (excess) in the practices of some Sufi orders, on the other hand, he respected those *'ulamā'* who practiced the more sober Sufism of the intellectual elites. By looking at the network of scholars with which Qāsimī associated, we can conclude that he represented the majority of the Damascene Salafis who condemned excesses and abuses, rather than Sufism as a whole. Qāsimī put forth a social explanation for the persistence of Sufi ritual innovations and customs and their resilience in the face of reformers' efforts to eliminate them. Most Muslims did not perceive such customs as innovations but as genuine religious practices; therefore, when reformers attacked innovations, they appeared to be assaulting religion itself.[110] Some of his numerous works attack popular practices in the visitation of saints' tombs and aim to remove innovations in ritual and un-Islamic customs practiced in the mosques of Damascus.

However, Qāsimī also made known his generally positive view of "true Sufism", taking the position of early Sufi masters. His reference to Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī is significant in so far as he attempted to demonstrate that the ecstatic ceremonies of Sufi orders were not supported by the teachings of such influential Sufi masters as Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī. Qāsimī's strong defense of the Shaykh Akbar compelled him to stand up against Ibn Taymiyya whom the Salafis often relied upon. Perhaps it is our scant knowledge of the nature of the relationship between Salafiyya and Sufism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that prevents us from explaining why some reformist-minded Muslims vehemently opposed Ibn ʿArabī's teaching, viewing it as a consummation of Sufi heresy, whereas others were ready to adopt and incorporate it along with that of his ardent detractor, namely Ibn

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[110] Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 80.

Taymiyya, into their own reformist programs. It is essential that we delve into the world of ideas current in that epoch in order to discover why intellectual Sufism was rejected or, alternatively, adopted as a foundation of Islamic reform by the so-called Salafis in different parts of the Muslim world. In so doing, we need to avoid any bald generalization about the inherent anti-Sufi attitude of the Salafiyya movement. The ambivalent relationship between the Salafiyya and Sufism will be better understood in a broader comparative framework supported by further case studies.